

COMMENTS FOR THE GOVERNOR'S HEALTHCARE REFORM IMPLEMENTATION COUNCIL NOVEMBER 16, 2010

The Illinois Podiatric Medical Association (IPMA) represents 80 percent of the podiatric Physicians in the state of Illinois. Podiatrists are licensed in the state of Illinois as physicians and surgeons of the foot and ankle to diagnose and treat medical and surgical conditions of the foot and ankle. We are an integral part of the healthcare delivery system. Access to podiatric care has become crucial with the rising incidence of diabetes and the increase in the geriatric population. After Jan 1, 2014 the Affordable Care Act (ACA) about 700,000 more Illinoisans will be eligible for Medicaid by including all those with incomes less than 133% of the Federal Poverty Level. Although we applaud the addition of people to the health care delivery system, we have serious concerns about the implementation of the program. The current Illinois Medicaid program has been plagued with an adverse reputation for managing its finances. This negative reputation is caused by extremely long payment cycles, often even resulting in a complete stoppage of payments because allocated funds have been completely depleted and physicians must wait until another fiscal year begins before they can be reimbursed for their critical services to the most vulnerable population. This doesn't even begin to address the low reimbursement rates to which health care providers are subjected. Most medical practices are experiencing rising overhead costs and shrinking profit margins; thus, it is becoming impossible for more and more practitioners to accept and treat a considerable number of Medicaid patients. Again, the most ill and vulnerable people will suffer from lack of access to care. In the states surrounding Illinois, most have reimbursement fee schedules from 20 to 30 percent higher for most services than the state of Illinois does. There are 'negotiations' on the table discussing raising rates to the level of current Medicare rates for Primary Care Physicians for current and potential Medicaid patients. This would be a good first step; however, a similar increase should be considered for specialists in order to ensure access to good quality care. Currently most Primary Care Physicians are experiencing difficulty finding specialists who accept Medicaid for their patients who need specialized care. In a soon to be published study by Thomson-Reuters and in another by Duke University, there is proof positive that in those patients seen and treated by podiatrists, there were 20% lower incidents of hospitalization and, most importantly, a 20% lower risk of limb amputation. The cost savings to the Medicaid program in just this area is millions of dollars. Therefore it is critical that foot and ankle care by podiatric physicians remain an integral part of the health care delivery system. Podiatrists render vital, cost-efficient care for the sicker and more co-morbid patients. The members of the Illinois Podiatric Medical Association definitely want to be included in the health care delivery system for the state of Illinois.

Thank you for this opportunity to address this issue. If we can be of further assistance, please contact the Illinois Podiatric Medical Association at 312-427-5810.

Sincerely,
Marlene Reid DPM President